

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

~~Claim~~ 1 (original): A method of making hollow, reinforced plastic composite articles, comprising the steps of:

- 5 a) providing:
- i) a hollow preform of reinforcing fibers intimately intermixed with a thermoplastic material, said preform having a cylindrical sidewall portion, a domed bottom portion, and a domed top portion, and
- 10 ii) a rigid mold having a cylindrical sidewall portion and domed end portions corresponding to said preform portions;
- b) positioning said preform against the inner surface of said corresponding mold portions;
- c) compressing said preform with an internally pressurized, inflatable core having a cylindrical sidewall portion, and top and bottom dome portions to hold said preform in place;
- 15 d) heating said preform to a temperature sufficient to melt said thermoplastic material while the pressure in said inflatable core compresses said preform and maintains the distribution of the thermoplastic material throughout said preform to provide a fiber reinforced molded article;
- f) cooling said molded article until said thermoplastic material is substantially solid;
- 20 g) reducing the pressure in said inflatable core; and
- h) removing said molded article from said mold.

Claim 2 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein the pressure in said inflatable core is increased during the heating step to compress said preforms and maintain the distribution of thermoplastic material throughout said preform, whereby voids in the fiber reinforced molded article may be further

5 reduced.

2. Claim 3 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said hollow preform comprises a separately preformed sidewall portion and integrated bottom portion and a separately preformed top dome portion.

Claim 4 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said hollow preform comprises a separately preformed cylindrical sidewall portion and comprises separately preformed domed portions.

Claim 5 (currently amended): The method of claim 4 wherein the separately preformed cylindrical sidewall portion is a filament wound sidewall portion and the separately preformed domed portions are filament wound ~~geodesic domed~~ isotensoid portions.

5. Claim 6 (original): The method of claim 5 wherein the sidewall portions overlap the domed portions.

Claim 7 (original): The method of claim 4 wherein said cylindrical sidewall portion is formed from a rectangular blanket of said reinforcing fibers intimately intermixed with said thermoplastic material, said blanket being positioned against said cylindrical sidewall portion of the mold with a slight overlap of opposite ends of said blanket.

Claim 8 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein the ratio of reinforcing fiber to thermoplastic material is substantially constant throughout said preform.

Claim 9 (original): The method of claim 8 wherein said ratio is approximately 3:2.

Claim 10 (currently amended): The method of claim 1 wherein the ratio of ~~glass~~ reinforcing fiber to thermoplastic material varies within said preform.

Claim 11 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein the wall thickness of said preform is substantially constant.

Claim 12 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein the wall thickness of said preform varies along its length.

Claim 13 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said reinforcing fibers are glass fibers.

Claim 14 (original): The method of claim 13 wherein said glass fibers are approximately 1 inch in length.

Claim 15 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said thermoplastic material is chosen from the group comprised of: polypropylene, polyethylene, polybutylene terephthalate, polyethylene terephthalate, and nylon.

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Claim 16 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising, prior to said compressing, the step of treating the outer surface of said inflatable core with an adhesive agent so that said core is bonded to the interior of said molded article.

Claim 17 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising, prior to said compressing, the steps of:

treating a surface of one of the top and bottom dome portions and an adjacent sidewall portion of said inflatable core with an adhesive agent to
5 provide an adhesive coated portion; and

treating a surface of another of said top and bottom dome portions and an adjacent sidewall portion with a releasing agent to provide a release coated portion; and, after said removing, the step of:

disengaging the release coated portion of said inflatable core from an
10 inner surface of said molded article while the adhesive coated portion remains adhered to an inner surface of said molded article.

Claim 18 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising, prior to said compressing, the step of treating the outer surface of said inflatable core with a releasing agent; and, after removing said molded article from the mold, the step of removing said inflatable core from said molded article.

Claim 19 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said temperature is approximately 400 °F and maintaining said temperature for a period of at least approximately 30 minutes.

Claim 20 (original): The method of claim 2 wherein said pressure is increased to approximately 2530 psi.

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Claim 21 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said thermoplastic material is in fibrous form.

Claim 22 (original): The method of claim 19 wherein said fibrous form is approximately 2 inch lengths of thermoplastic material.

Claim 23 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said thermoplastic material is provided in particulate form.

Claim 24 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein said inflatable core is a neoprene bladder.

Claim 25 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of connecting said mold to a source of vacuum during the heating step to further reduce the incidence of voids in the finished article.

Claim 26 (original): The method of claim 2 further comprising the step of connecting said mold to a source of vacuum during the heating step to further reduce the incidence of voids in the finished article.

Claim 27 (original): A method of making hollow, reinforced plastic composite articles, comprising the steps of:

- 5 a) providing:
- i) a hollow preform comprised of reinforcing fibers intimately intermixed with a thermoplastic material, said preform having a cylindrical sidewall portion, a domed bottom portion, and a domed top portion;
- 10 ii) a hollow plastic liner within said preform, said liner having a cylindrical sidewall portion, a domed bottom portion, and a domed top portion; and
- iii) a rigid mold having a cylindrical sidewall portion and domed end portions corresponding to said preform portions;
- 15 b) positioning said preform against the inner surface of said corresponding mold portions;
- c) heating said preform sufficient to melt said thermoplastic material and distribute the thermoplastic material throughout said preform to provide a fiber reinforced molded article;
- d) cooling said molded article until said thermoplastic material is substantially solid; and
- 20 e) removing said molded article from said mold.

Claim 28 (original): The method of claim 27 wherein said plastic liner is a thermoplastic liner.

Claim 29 (original): The method of claim 27 further comprising, during said heating, the step of pressurizing the plastic liner with a gas or a fluid; and prior to removing said molded article from the mold, the step of reducing the pressure in said plastic liner.

Claim 30 (original): The method of claim 29 further comprising, during said heating, the step of connecting said mold to a source of vacuum during the pressurizing step to further reduce the incidence of voids in the finished

article.

Claim 31 (original): A method of making hollow, reinforced plastic composite articles, comprising the steps of:

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- 5 a) providing:
 - 10 i) a hollow preform of glass reinforcing fibers approximately one inch long intimately intermixed with thermoplastic fibers approximately two inches long, wherein the ratio of glass fibers to resin fibers is approximately 3:2 uniformly throughout said preform, said preform having a cylindrical sidewall portion, a domed bottom portion, and a domed top portion, and
 - 15 ii) a rigid mold having a cylindrical sidewall portion and domed end portions corresponding to said preform portions;
 - b) positioning said preform against the inner surface of said corresponding mold portions;
 - c) compressing said preform with an internally pressurized, flexible
15 inflatable core having a cylindrical sidewall portion, and top and bottom dome portions to hold said preform in place;
 - d) heating said preform to approximately 400 degrees F while maintaining that temperature for between 20 and 60 minutes, while also increasing the pressure in said inflatable core to approximately 25-30 psi to
20 compress said preform and maintain the distribution of the thermoplastic material throughout said preform to provide a substantially void free fiber reinforced molded article;
 - f) cooling said molded article until said thermoplastic material is substantially solid;
 - 25 g) reducing the pressure in said inflatable core;
 - h) removing said molded article from said mold; and
 - i) removing said inflatable core from the molded article.

Claim 32 (currently amended): The method of ~~claim 29~~ claim 31 further comprising the step of connecting said mold to a source of vacuum during said heating to further reduce the incidence of voids in the finished article.

Claim 33 (original): A method of making hollow, reinforced plastic composite articles, comprising the steps of:

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- a) providing:
- i) a hollow preform of glass reinforcing fibers intermixed with thermoplastic material, said preform having a filament wound cylindrical sidewall portion, a filament wound domed bottom portion, and a filament wound domed top portion, wherein said cylindrical sidewall portion overlaps each geodesic domed portion; and
- 10 ii) a rigid mold having a cylindrical sidewall portion and domed end portions corresponding to said preform portions;
- b) positioning said preform against the inner surface of said corresponding mold portions;
- c) compressing said preform with an internally pressurized, flexible inflatable core having a cylindrical sidewall portion, and top and bottom dome
- 15 portions to hold said preform in place;
- d) heating said preform to approximately 400 degrees F while maintaining that temperature for between 20 and 60 minutes, while also increasing the pressure in said inflatable core to approximately 25-30 psi to compress said preform and maintain the distribution of the thermoplastic
- 20 material throughout said preform to provide a substantially void free fiber reinforced molded article;
- f) cooling said molded article until said thermoplastic material is substantially solid;
- g) reducing the pressure in said inflatable core;
- 25 h) removing said molded article from said mold; and
- i) removing said inflatable core from the molded article.

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Claim ~~[[32]]~~ 34 (currently amended): The method of ~~claim 34~~ claim 33 further comprising the step of connecting said mold to a source of vacuum during said heating to further reduce the incidence of voids in the finished article.
